

SEA TROUT CONSERVATION GUIDELINES

WHAT IS A SEA TROUT

Sea trout are the sea-running form of the brown trout (*Salmo trutta*). Scottish rivers were colonised by sea trout at the end of the last Ice Age, and their descendents form the populations of brown trout and sea trout we know today (both *Salmo trutta*). It is believed that genetics and environmental issues (such as habitat and food availability) play an important part in whether or not a trout migrates to sea.

KEY SEA TROUT FACTS

An 'International Sea Trout Symposium' in 2004 highlighted the following key points:

- Sea trout are the sea-running form of brown trout;
- Sea trout and brown trout interbreed;
- The majority of sea trout are female;
- Unlike salmon, sea trout can return to spawn up to 10 times;
- Because of their large size, female sea trout provide most of the trout eggs laid in a river;
- Genetic studies show that larger, longer-lived sea trout produce young that are also likely to grow large;
- 'Finnock' are sea trout in their first year after leaving the river as smolts;
- Some finnock enter rivers in the summer/autumn, and some of these breed;
- Sea trout and brown trout should be managed jointly.

LEGAL PROTECTION

Under the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 2003, sea trout have the same legal status as salmon. This means that written permission is required to fish for them both in inland waters and the sea up to 1.5 kilometres seaward from mean low water springs.

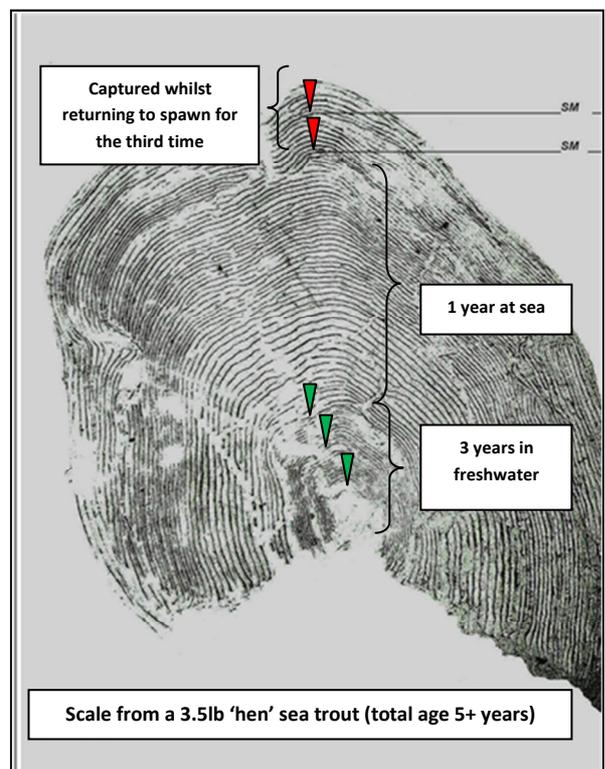
CURRENT STATUS OF SEA TROUT

The Moray Firth once supported a prolific rod and line fishery for sea trout, with the total annual reported Ness district catch peaking at 3,540 fish in 1960. Since that time catches have steadily decreased. A total sea trout catch of just 82 fish was reported during the 2013 season.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP

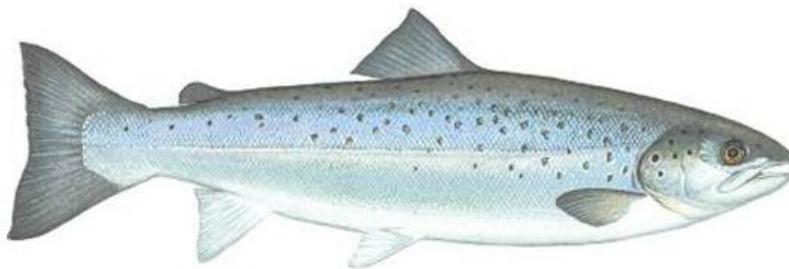
- Only fish for sea trout when in possession of a valid fishing permit and ensure that you **comply fully with the rules**;

This policy not only covers sea trout, but also those who fish for them. The NDSFB wants you, the angler, to return every year and anglers fishing the Ness system should always consider their own and other's safety. The Ness Board commends the use of lifejackets whether fishing from a boat or wading.



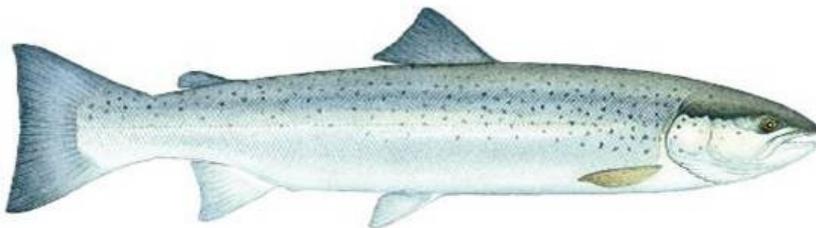
- Help conserve sea trout stocks by showing **restraint in the number and size of fish** that you kill (i.e. don't kill the bag limit just because you can!). We would recommend the **release of all large sea trout over 3lbs** as they are important brood stock for future generations;
- All sea trout kelts should be returned as soon as possible, if in doubt put back (see illustration below); and
- Catch statistics are a vital tool in determining the local and national trends in sea trout populations so **don't forget to fill in your return form** (for both killed and returned fish including finnock).

SEA TROUT RECOGNITION



FRESH RUN SEA TROUT

Easily recognised by bright silver sides, white lower fins and loose, easily detached scales. Some carry sea lice which drop-off in fresh water within a few days. After 2 or 3 weeks they lose the silver and appear like dull coloured brown trout, lacking true red spots. Mature sea trout vary widely in size depending on marine growth and longevity. Typically, at first spawning return they may be about 350-450 mm in body length and weigh around 0.5-1.5kg. Older specimens, which may have spawned several times, can range to in excess of 10kg, while maiden sea trout of this very large size can be found in the southern North Sea and the Baltic Sea.



SEA TROUT KELT

Encountered in Springtime, well-mended kelts are silvery and can be mistaken for fresh run sea trout. They are normally slimmer in shape and can often be distinguished by whitish-silver flanks which lack the iridescent colours of fresh-run fish. All kelts should be returned as soon as possible, failure to do so is an offence under the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 2003. If in doubt put it back.



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www.atlanticsalmontrust.org



HOW DO I SAFELY RELEASE A SEA TROUT?

- Use single barbless hooks and as strong a tippet as possible;
- Play the sea trout quickly and where possible net the fish without contact with the bed or bank;
- Handle the fish as little as possible, using tweezers or pliers to remove the hook and then release from the net;
- If the sea trout has been played to exhaustion, hold it carefully with its head facing the current until it regains sufficient strength to swim away; and
- Take extra care in the summer months when water temperatures are high and fish take longer to recover.

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